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United Nations Conferences and Observances

Protecting and promoting human rights will be a major theme at the United Nations during 1993, with the convening of the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 14-25 June), preceded by the fourth session of its Preparatory Committee (Geneva, 22 March-2 April) and by regional preparatory meetings. In addition, 1993 is being observed as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, the aim of which is to strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous communities in the areas of human rights, the environment, development, education and health.

Environment and development is another central theme, following the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development -- the Earth Summit. An Intergovernmental Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks will convene in New York in June, to identify and assess problems related to the conservation and management of such fish stocks and improve fisheries cooperation among States. And in April 1994, the First Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States will take place in Barbados. The convening of both Conferences were among the recommendations contained in "Agenda 21", a programme for sustainable development extending into the twenty-first century.

Major international meetings are scheduled for 1994 through 1996: the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction (Yokohama, Japan, 23-27 May 1994); the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, Egypt, 5-13 September 1994); the World Summit for Social Development (Denmark, early 1995); the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace (Beijing, China, 4-15 September 1995); and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (Turkey, 3-14 June 1996).

Preparations are under way for the observance of the International Year of the Family (1994), the United Nations Year for Tolerance (1995) and the International Year of Older Persons (1999). The fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations will be commemorated in 1995. In addition, the General Assembly has proclaimed three new observances: World Day for Water (22 March), the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October) and the International Day of Disabled Persons (3 December).

The following pages contain information on United Nations conferences and special observances scheduled for 1993 and ensuing years, as well as various internationally recognized decades, years, weeks and days.

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Third Disarmament Decade (1990s)

On 4 December 1990, the General Assembly declared the 1990s as the Third Disarmament Decade (resolution 45/62 A). That followed the declaration of two earlier disarmament decades, in the 1970s and 1980s.

In adopting the Declaration of the 1990s as the Third Disarmament Decade, the Assembly stated that, despite a noticeable improvement during the latter part of the 1980s in the way many States conducted their relations, the specific goals of the Second Disarmament Decade had not been fully realized. It identified common objectives of the international community in the 1990s, including: reducing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons; a comprehensive nuclear-test ban; strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime and halting the nuclear-arms race; promoting cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy under agreed safeguards; and reducing conventional arms and armed forces.

Other objectives of the Disarmament Decade included the negotiation of a convention prohibiting all chemical weapons; preventing an arms race in outer space; greater transparency in military matters; advancing the scope and techniques of verification; and promoting the use of science and technology for peaceful purposes.

The Decade has already witnessed major achievements in arms reduction and disarmament. On 30 November 1992, the Assembly endorsed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (resolution 47/39), which was opened for signature in Paris in January 1993, after more than 20 years of negotiations by the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. The Assembly also welcomed the signing of two Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties between the United States and the Russian Federation as well as the unilateral cuts in nuclear arsenals announced by the two countries (resolution 47/51 K).

Disarmament Week (24-30 October)

The annual observance of Disarmament Week, which begins on the anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, was first called for in the Final Document of the General Assembly's 1978 special session on disarmament (resolution S-10/2). States were invited to expose the danger of the arms race, propagate the need for its cessation and increase public understanding of the urgent tasks of disarmament. Governmental and non-governmental organizations were invited to undertake annual activities to mark the Week. In 1979, at the Assembly's request, the Secretary-General drew up the elements of a model programme for the Week which might assist States in developing their own observances.

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On 9 December 1992, the Assembly commended all States, international and national governmental and non-governmental organizations for their support for and participation in Disarmament Week (resolution 47/54 C). It also invited the Secretary-General to use the United Nations information organs as widely as possible to promote a better understanding among the world public of disarmament problems and the objectives of Disarmament Week.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: 1995 Conference and its Preparatory Committee

On 9 December 1992, the General Assembly took note of the decision of the parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to form a Preparatory Committee for a conference to review the operation of the Treaty and to decide on its extension, as provided for by the Treaty. It noted that the Preparatory Committee would hold its first meeting in New York from 10 to 14 May 1993, and requested the Secretary-General to render the necessary assistance to the Committee (resolution 47/52 A). The Treaty provides for the convening of review conferences every five years.

The NPT, which entered into force on 5 March 1970, calls for nuclear-weapon States parties to the Treaty to make a commitment not to transfer to other countries any nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Non-nuclear-weapon States ratifying the Treaty undertake not to receive, manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Parties to the Treaty also agree to facilitate a full exchange of equipment and information for the peaceful uses of atomic energy and to ensure that the benefits of any peaceful application of nuclear explosions are made available to all non-nuclear-weapon States, at the lowest cost.

PALESTINE QUESTION

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (29 November)

By a resolution adopted in December 1977, the General Assembly called for the annual observance of 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (resolution 32/40 B).

In 1992, the Assembly once again took note of the action taken by Member States to observe the Day of Solidarity and requested them to continue to give it the widest possible publicity (resolution 47/64 B). Affirming that the United Nations had a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until it was resolved in a satisfactory manner "in accordance with international legitimacy", the Assembly authorized the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to give special emphasis to the need to mobilize public opinion in Europe and North America (resolution 47/64 A). The Assembly also called for cooperation with non-governmental organizations that were contributing to the heightening of international awareness of the facts relating to the question of Palestine.

SOUTH AFRICA

Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of All Colonial Territories, as well as Those in South Africa, Fighting for Freedom, Independence and Human Rights (Beginning on 25 May)

In 1972, the General Assembly proclaimed the week beginning 25 May (Africa Liberation Day) as a Week of Solidarity with the Colonial Peoples of Southern Africa Fighting for Freedom, Independence and Equal Rights, and appealed to the Governments and peoples of the world to observe it annually (resolution 2911 (XXVII)).

Acting on the recommendation of the Special Committee against Apartheid, the United Nations Council for Namibia and the Special Committee on decolonization, the Assembly in November 1982 (decision 37/421) changed the title of the observance to "Week of Solidarity with the Peoples of Namibia and All Other Colonial Territories, as well as Those in South Africa, Fighting for Freedom, Independence and Human Rights". Following Namibia's independence in 1990, the Week was given its present title. Since the proclamation of the Week, the United Nations has undertaken a series of activities to observe it, with the cooperation of the Department of Public Information (DPI), assisted by United Nations information centres.

International Day of Solidarity with the Struggling People of South Africa (16 June)

In 1976, the General Assembly proclaimed 16 June as the International Day of Solidarity with the Struggling People of South Africa, and called on Member States to commemorate it annually (resolution 31/6 I). The Day marked the anniversary of the 1976 uprising in Soweto and other areas in South Africa, when police opened fire on student demonstrators demanding better education for black students. Many were killed and scores were wounded. The Special Committee against Apartheid observes the Day, also known as Soweto Day, annually, to reaffirm its commitment to the total eradication of apartheid and to the restoration of fundamental human rights to the suffering people of South Africa. At a solemn meeting on 16 June 1992, the Special Committee commemorated the sixteenth anniversary of the Day.

International Day of Solidarity with the Struggle of Women in South Africa (9 August)

The General Assembly called, in 1981, for the annual observance of 9 August as the International Day of Solidarity with the Struggle of Women in South Africa, to commemorate the historic 1956 demonstration by 20,000 women against that country's "pass laws". The Assembly also appealed to all Governments and organizations "to provide generous contributions to the projects of the national liberation movements and front-line States for assistance to refugee women and children from South Africa" (resolution 36/172 K). Since then, the Day had been observed annually at Headquarters by the Special Committee against Apartheid, which has been active in publicizing the plight of black women under apartheid in South Africa, and in promoting assistance to refugee women and children from that country and, earlier, also from Namibia.

Day of Solidarity with South African Political Prisoners (11 October)

The observance of 11 October as a Day of Solidarity with South African Political Prisoners was proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1976, in a resolution which demanded "the immediate and unconditional release of all persons imprisoned or restricted for their involvement in the struggle for liberation in South Africa" (resolution 31/6 C).

Since then, the Special Committee against Apartheid has observed the Day annually to highlight the plight of political prisoners in South Africa. On 18 December 1992, the Assembly adopted resolution 47/116 A in which it noted with satisfaction the release of "prisoners held for their political beliefs or activities" and appealed to the international community to increase humanitarian and legal assistance to victims of apartheid, returning refugees and exiles, and to released political prisoners.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

World Summit for Social Development (1995)

By resolution 47/92 of 16 December 1992, the General Assembly decided to convene in early 1995, at the level of Heads of State or Government, a World Summit for Social Development, and accepted the offer of the Government of Denmark to host it.

Among the Summit's objectives are: to express a shared world-wide commitment to put the needs of people at the centre of development and of international cooperation; and to address, in creative ways, the need to attain a balance between economic efficiency and social justice in a growth-oriented, equitable and sustainable development environment in accordance with nationally defined priorities. The core issues affecting all societies to be discussed are: enhancement of social integration, particularly of the more disadvantaged and marginalized groups; alleviation and reduction of poverty; and expansion of productive employment.

The Assembly established a Preparatory Committee for the Summit, open to the participation of Member States and members of the specialized agencies. It will hold a one-week organizational session in April and three substantive sessions in 1994 of no more than 10 working days each, all to take place at Headquarters.

Following a recommendation by the Assembly, the Economic and Social Council decided to consider, at the high-level segment of its substantive session of 1993, the following major theme: "World Summit for Social Development, including the role of the United Nations system in promoting social development".

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992) adopted three major documents: the "Rio Declaration on Environment and Development" -- a set of 27 principles to govern the economic and environmental behaviour of individuals and nations in their pursuit of global sustainability; "Agenda 21" -- a programme of action extending into the twenty-first century and covering all areas affecting the relationship between the environment and the economy; and the "Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus in the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests" -- which provides for the multiple and complementary functions and uses of forests. Those documents were endorsed by General Assembly resolution 47/190 of 22 December 1992.

Recommendations, proposals and commitments agreed upon at UNCED were the subject of several resolutions at the Assembly's forty-seventh session as it took action on the follow-up to the Conference.

By resolution 47/191 of 22 December 1992, the Assembly requested the Economic and Social Council to set up, as one of its functional bodies, a Commission on Sustainable Development. Among the Commission's tasks would be to ensure the follow-up to the Rio Conference; enhance international cooperation and rationalize the intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environment and development issues; and monitor progress in the implementation of "Agenda 21" at the national, regional and international levels. The Commission was established by a Council decision on 12 February 1993, and its first substantive session will be held in New York from 14 to 25 June.

Intergovernmental Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (1993)

The General Assembly decided, on 22 December 1992, to convene, in 1993, under United Nations auspices, an Intergovernmental Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (resolution 47/192). Taking into account the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea concerning those fish stocks, the Conference was asked to identify and assess existing problems related to the conservation and management of such fish stocks; to consider means of improving fisheries cooperation among States; and to formulate recommendations on those matters. Requested to complete its work in advance of the Assembly's forty-ninth session, the Conference will hold an organizational session from 19 to 23 April and will convene again from 12 to 30 July to deal with substantive matters. Both sessions will be held at Headquarters.

Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (1994)

The General Assembly decided to convene, in April 1994, in Barbados, the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (resolution 47/189). The Conference is to elaborate strategies and measures to enhance the sustainable development of those States in the context of world-wide efforts to promote sustainable and environmentally sound development by, among other things, examining the nature and magnitude of their specific vulnerabilities in order to define and/or formulate specific indicators of vulnerability in a way that has operational applicability. The Assembly established a Preparatory Committee for the Conference, which will hold an organizational session from 26 to 27 April and a two-week substantive session in August, both to be held at Headquarters.

Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa

By adopting resolution 47/188, the General Assembly established, under its auspices, an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, as a forum for Governments to negotiate such a convention, with a view to finalizing it by June 1994. The Committee held an organizational session from 26 to 29 January in New York. Its five substantive sessions will be held as follows: 24 May to 3 June, in Nairobi; 13 to 24 September, in Geneva; 17 to 28 January 1994, in New York; 21 to 31 March 1994, in Geneva; and the final session in early June 1994, in Paris.

World Day for Water
(22 March)

The General Assembly has declared 22 March as World Day for Water (resolution 47/193). The observance of that Day aims to promote public awareness of the extent to which water resource development contributes to economic productivity and social well-being.

World Environment Day
(5 June)

By resolution 2994 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972, the General Assembly designated 5 June as World Environment Day, with the aim of deepening public awareness of the need for the preservation and enhancement of the environment. That date was chosen because it was the opening day of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972), which resulted in the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Twenty years later, the Assembly convened the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and nations came together to take the decisions needed to rekindle the hopes of the 1972 Conference and to take up the challenges of a viable and equitable balance between environment and development and a sustainable future for the earth and its people.

DEVELOPMENT

Fourth United Nations Development Decade
(1991-2000)

The General Assembly, by resolution 45/199 of 21 December 1990, proclaimed the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, starting on 1 January 1991, and adopted the International Development Strategy for the Decade. The principal aim of the Strategy was to ensure that the 1990s would be a decade of accelerated development in the developing countries and of strengthened international cooperation, a period that would witness a significant improvement in the human condition in those countries and a reduction in the gap between rich and poor countries. Sustained growth at a rate of 7 per cent was considered a necessary condition for a transformation of the economy in developing countries, with rapid increases in productive employment and poverty eradication as well as the generation of resources needed for the protection of the environment.

To achieve those aims, interrelated goals were stated, among them: a development process that was responsive to social needs, sought to reduce significantly extreme poverty, promoted the development of human resources and skills, and was environmentally sound and sustainable; improvement of the international money, finance and trade systems; a stronger and more stable world economy and sound macroeconomic management, nationally and internationally; and special efforts to deal with the problems of the least developed countries. To reactivate development, the Strategy recommends actions in areas such as external debt, development finance, international trade, commodities, science and technology, industrial policies and agriculture.

The First United Nations Development Decade, proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 1710 (XVI) of 1961, stemmed from a recognition by the international community of its responsibility to seek a better life for all peoples. Broad policies and goals were outlined to help increase economic growth in developing countries by at least 5 per cent by the end of the Decade. Such policies and goals have been reaffirmed, expanded and revised in succeeding development decades and accompanying international development strategies. The Second Decade was proclaimed by resolution 2626 (XXV) of 1970, and the Third Decade by resolution 35/56 of 1980.

Transport and Communications Decade for Asia and the Pacific (1985-1996)

As proposed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and recommended by the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly proclaimed, on 18 December 1984, the Transport and Communications Decade for Asia and the Pacific, starting on 1 January 1985 and ending on 31 December 1994 (resolution 39/227). The Assembly subsequently changed the second five-year period of the Decade to 1992-1996, to have it coincide with the 1992-1997 medium-term plan and facilitate preparations for a regional action programme (decision 46/453).

The objectives of the Decade include raising the transport and communications infrastructures of developing ESCAP member countries to a level commensurate with their development objectives and priorities, giving particular attention to the special needs of the region's least developed, land-locked and island developing countries; promoting a more efficient transport and communications network comprising all modes and means in an integrated way, particularly for the development of intra- and interregional linkages; and encouraging coordination and cooperation in transport and communications in the region. The strategy themes developed in the regional action programme for phase II of the Decade focused on institutional and human resources development as well as the transport and communications operations and commercialization, with emphasis on the problems of urban transport and transport and communications in rural and remote areas.

Second Transport and Communications Decade in Africa (1991-2000)

The General Assembly, by resolution 43/179, declared the period 1991-2000 the Second Transport and Communications Decade in Africa, as recommended by the Economic and Social Council. A two-year preparatory period followed the end of the first Decade (1978-1988), and the launching of the Second. By its decision 46/456, the Assembly endorsed Council resolution 1991/83, in which the Council had adopted the programme for the Second Decade.

The first Decade was proclaimed by Assembly resolution 32/160 of 1977. Its aim was to prepare and implement a global strategy for the development of transport and communications in Africa in order to solve problems in those fields, and mobilize technical and financial resources. In evaluating the First Decade, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) concluded that it had given a major boost to the future development of transport and communications by equipping Africa with a policy and strategy, as well as institutions and mechanisms for their implementation.

Second Industrial Development Decade for Africa (1993-2002)

On the recommendation of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the General Assembly proclaimed the period 1991-2000 as the Second Industrial Development Decade for Africa (resolution 44/237). On 22 December 1992, the Assembly adopted the programme for the Second Decade and decided to adjust the period to 1993-2002 (resolution 47/177).

By its resolution 35/66 B of 5 December 1980, the Assembly, on the recommendation of UNIDO, had proclaimed the First Decade (1981-1990) with the aim of mobilizing greater political commitment as well as financial and technical support for the industrialization of Africa. Among priority areas for the formulation of the Decade's policies and plans were the development of energy technology and equipment, the promotion of intra-African industrial cooperation and the mobilization of financial resources. In June 1986, the Assembly adopted the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990, by which the international community committed itself to helping Africa in launching long-term programmes for self-sustaining socio-economic development and growth. The implementation of those programmes was expected to contribute to the realization of the goals of both the Industrial Development Decade and the Transport and Communications Decade.

Africa Industrialization Day (20 November)

Within the framework of the Second Industrial Development Decade for Africa, the General Assembly proclaimed 20 November as Africa Industrialization Day (resolution 44/237 of 22 December 1989). The observance of that Day is intended to mobilize the commitment of the international community to the industrialization of Africa.

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October)

The General Assembly has declared 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (resolution 47/196). The observance of that Day aims to promote public awareness of the eradication of poverty and destitution in all countries, particularly in developing countries, which has become a priority of development in the 1990s.

POPULATION

International Conference on Population and Development (1994)

On the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly decided to convene the International Conference on Population and Development from 5 to 13 September 1994, and accepted the offer of the Government of Egypt to host it in Cairo (resolution 47/176). The overall theme of the Conference, which the Assembly recommended be held at the ministerial level, is "population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development".

Among the Conference's objectives are: to contribute to the review and appraisal of the progress made in the implementation of the World Population Plan of Action, adopted by the United Nations Population Conference (Bucharest, 1974); and to strengthen awareness of population issues and their linkage to development. Also to be emphasized by the Conference will be the national sovereignty of countries in formulating and implementing population policies according to their cultures, values and traditions, as well as their social, economic and political conditions.

The Population Commission, acting as the Preparatory Committee for the Conference, held a first substantive session from 4 to 8 March 1991, in New York. Its second session will be held from 10 to 21 May, and the third from 11 to 22 April 1994, both in New York. Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is the Secretary-General of the Conference.

HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (1996)

The General Assembly decided to convene the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) from 3 to 14 June 1996 in Turkey (resolution 47/180). The Conference, which will address human settlements issues in the context of sustainable development, has among its objectives: to arrest the deterioration of global human settlements and create the conditions for achieving improvements in the living environment of all people on a sustainable basis; to review trends in national and international policies and programmes to implement recommendations adopted by the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat) (Vancouver, 1976); and to conduct a mid-term review of the implementation of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 (resolution 43/181).

The Assembly established a Preparatory Committee for the Conference, open to the participation of Member States and members of the specialized agencies. It will hold a three-day organizational session from 3 to 5 March, at Headquarters; and two substantive sessions, the first in early 1994, in Geneva or New York, and the second in conjunction with the 1995 session of the Commission on Human Settlements.

NATURAL DISASTERS

International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990s)

By resolution 42/169 of 11 December 1987, the General Assembly designated the 1990s as a decade in which the international community, under United Nations auspices, would pay special attention to fostering international cooperation in the field of natural disaster reduction. It proclaimed the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, beginning on 1 January 1990, and adopted an International Framework of Action for the Decade (resolution 44/236).

The Decade's objective is to reduce, through concerted international actions, especially in developing countries, loss of life, property damage and social and economic disruption caused by natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, and other calamities of natural origin, such as grasshopper and locust infestations. Among its goals are: to improve the capacity of each country to mitigate the effects of natural disasters expeditiously and effectively, including by paying special attention to the establishment of early-warning systems; to foster scientific and engineering endeavours aimed at closing critical gaps in knowledge in order to reduce loss of life and property; and to develop measures for assessing, predicting, preventing and mitigating natural disasters through programmes of technical assistance and technology transfer, demonstration projects, education and training. The secretariat for the Decade, based in Geneva, is under the authority of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction (1994)

The United Nations will convene, in Yokohama, Japan, from 23 to 27 May 1994, the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, the purpose of which is to review progress and achievements of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction at its mid-term and to establish priorities for the balance of the Decade. It will focus on progress made at the national level and on the process of promoting and implementing disaster mitigation. On 18 December 1991, the General Assembly had endorsed a proposal of the Scientific and Technical Committee of the Decade on convening such a conference.

At its fourth session, held in New Delhi, India, from 1 to 5 February 1993, the Committee recommended to the Assembly that the aims of the Conference should be: a review of progress made towards meeting the targets of the Decade at the national, regional and international levels; the development of plans to achieve those targets in the second half of the Decade; and the promotion of increased awareness by high-level officials of the importance of implementing disaster reduction policies. Hosted by the Government of Japan, the Conference participants will be drawn from national committees for the Decade, other national groups, international bodies and non-governmental organizations, scientific and technical associations, the media and industrial and financial sectors.

International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction (Second Wednesday of October)

Within the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the General Assembly designated the second Wednesday of October as International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, to be observed annually by the international community during the Decade in a manner befitting its objective and goals (resolution 44/236). The theme for the 1993 observance of the International Day is "Stop disasters: focus on schools and hospitals", as decided by the Scientific and Technical Committee of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction at its fourth session, held from 1 to 5 February 1993 in New Delhi.

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (1983-1993)

At its thirty-eighth session, the General Assembly proclaimed the 10-year period beginning on 10 December 1983 as the Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, approved a Programme of Action for the Decade and called on all States to cooperate in its implementation. The Assembly also requested the Economic and Social Council, with the help of the Secretary-General, to coordinate the implementation of the Action Programme and to evaluate the activities undertaken during the Decade (resolution 38/14).

Ten years earlier, the Assembly had designated the decade beginning on 10 December 1973 (Human Rights Day) as the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, and had adopted a Programme setting forth the goals of the Decade and the measures to be taken at the national, regional and international levels to achieve them (resolution 3057 (XXVIII)).

As that Decade came to an end, the Second World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination was convened at Geneva in August 1983 (the first World Conference had been held in 1978) to evaluate its accomplishments. After considering the Conference's report, the Assembly noted with concern that, despite the efforts of the international community, the Decade had not achieved its principal objectives and that millions of people continued to be victims of racism and racial discrimination. On the Conference's recommendation, the Assembly proclaimed a Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination.

The Programme of Action, for which a Trust Fund was established, calls for measures in these areas: action to combat apartheid; education, teaching and training to create a favourable atmosphere for the eradication of racism and racial discrimination; dissemination of information and increased role of the mass media in combating racial discrimination; measures for promoting and protecting the human rights of minorities, indigenous peoples and migrant workers; recourse procedures for victims of discrimination; implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and related international instruments; national legislation and institutions; seminars and studies; action by non-governmental organizations; and international cooperation.

In 1987, the Assembly approved a plan of activities submitted by the Secretary-General, for implementation during the second half of the Decade (1990-1993), and invited the international community to participate fully (resolution 42/47). The activities for 1992-1993 include expert meetings on the preparation of teaching materials to combat racial discrimination; additional language versions of the handbook of recourse procedures for victims of discrimination; workshops on legislation to combat discrimination; an international campaign on the main obstacles to eradicating discrimination and apartheid; a study on the treatment of political prisoners and detainees in South Africa; and a study of the dissemination of the International Convention.

By resolution 47/77 of 16 December 1992, the Assembly decided that the highest priority should continue to be given to programmes for combating racism, racial discrimination and apartheid, and that all parts of the Programme of Action for the Decade should be given equal attention in order to attain its objectives. The Assembly regretted that most of the activities scheduled for 1992-1993 had not been implemented because of lack of adequate resources, and called upon the international community to provide the Secretary-General with the financial resources for efficient action against racism and racial discrimination. The Secretary-General was also requested to give the highest priority to activities of the programme of action for a third decade, aimed at monitoring the transition from apartheid to a non-racist society in South Africa.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (21 March)

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is observed annually on 21 March -- the anniversary of the day in 1960 when at a peaceful demonstration against the apartheid "pass laws" in Sharpeville, South Africa, police opened fire, killing 69 blacks. Proclaiming the International Day in 1966, the General Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination (resolution 2142 (XXI)). On 20 March 1992, the Special Committee against Apartheid marked the thirty-second anniversary of the Sharpeville incident with a solemn meeting and a round-table discussion on institutionalized racism in South Africa.

Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination (Beginning on 21 March)

As part of its programme for the first Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, the General Assembly in 1979 called for the observance by all States of a Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination, beginning on 21 March (resolution 34/24). In resolution 47/77 of 16 December 1992, the Assembly appealed to Governments and to international and non-governmental organizations to increase and intensify their activities to combat racism, racial discrimination and apartheid, and to provide relief and assistance to the victims of those evils.

HUMAN RIGHTS

World Conference on Human Rights (1993)

The General Assembly decided on 18 December 1990 to convene a World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 (resolution 45/155). The Conference, to be held in Vienna from 14 to 25 June, will review progress in the enjoyment of human rights since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and identify obstacles to progress and the ways to overcome them.

The Conference will also consider the relationship between development, democracy and the universal enjoyment of all human rights. It will make recommendations on how to strengthen international cooperation in the field of human rights in conformity with the Charter and international human rights instruments; improve implementation of existing human rights instruments; ensure objectivity and non-selectivity in considering human rights issues; enhance the effectiveness of United Nations activities and mechanisms dealing with human rights; and secure the necessary financial and other resources for United Nations human rights activities. The Conference will also commemorate the International Year of the World's Indigenous People (1993).

United Nations Year for Tolerance (1995)

Welcoming the initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in proclaiming 1995 the United Nations Year for Tolerance, the General Assembly on 18 December 1992 requested the Director-General of UNESCO to make suggestions for the observance of the Year (resolution 47/124). It also invited the Economic and Social Council to consider how best to observe the Year and to transmit its proposals to the next session of the Assembly.

Human Rights Day (10 December)

All States and interested organizations were invited by the General Assembly in 1950 to observe 10 December as Human Rights Day (resolution 423 (V)). The Day marks the anniversary of the Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

International Year of the World's Indigenous People (1993)

In an effort to strengthen international cooperation to resolve problems faced by indigenous communities in such areas as human rights, development, education, health and the environment, the General Assembly proclaimed 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People on 18 December 1990 (resolution 45/164).

"Indigenous people -- a new partnership" was designated the theme for the Year by the Assembly. Organizations for indigenous people, United Nations specialized agencies and other interested organizations were invited to consider activities they could undertake in connection with the observance of the Year. A programme of activities for the Year, presented by the Secretary-General, was approved by the Assembly on 17 December 1991 (resolution 46/128). In 1992, the Assembly called on all United Nations agencies and Governments to develop policies in support of the objectives of the Year (resolution 47/75). The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, to be held in June, will also commemorate the International Year.

WOMEN

World Conference on Women (1995)

The General Assembly, on 14 December 1990, decided to hold the Fourth World Conference on Women in order to conduct the second five-year review of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000 (resolution 45/129). In December 1992, the Assembly decided the Conference would be held from 4 to 15 September 1995 and accepted the offer made by China to host it in Beijing (resolution 47/95).

By the same resolution, the Assembly emphasized the importance of the total integration of women in the development process and called on Member States to establish specific targets to increase the participation of women in professional, management and decision-making positions in their countries.

In addition to reviewing the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, which were adopted at the 1985 World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, the Conference will determine the measures necessary to ensure that the Nairobi Strategies achieve their objectives. It will provide a focus for national reviews and appraisals of policies for the advancement of women, set targets and mobilize interest in the issue. Regional preparatory meetings will be held in 1993 and 1994 in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Commission on the Status of Women decided on 8 March 1991 that the Conference should be entitled "Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace" (decision 35/101).

DISABLED PERSONS

International Day of Disabled Persons (3 December)

At the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992), the General Assembly, on 14 October 1992, proclaimed 3 December as the International Day of Disabled Persons (resolution 47/3). The Decade had been a period of raising awareness and enacting measures to improve the situation of the disabled and to provide them with equal opportunities. Subsequently, the Assembly appealed to Member States to highlight the annual observance of the International Day on 3 December in order to further integrate people with disabilities into society (resolution 47/88).

The Assembly stressed the need for more vigorous and broader action to fulfil the objectives of the Decade. It urged Governments and national, regional and international organizations to cooperate in observing the International Day. It also requested the Secretary-General to turn the United Nations World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons from awareness-raising to action. The Assembly also welcomed the initiative of the United States to act as host, in cooperation with the United Nations, to an international conference on disability in the autumn of 1993.

Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002)

The Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002) is intended to give fresh impetus to the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons in the region covered by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). It is also meant to strengthen regional cooperation in achieving the goals of the World Programme. The Decade was proclaimed on 23 April 1992 by ESCAP resolution 48/3, and endorsed by the General Assembly on 16 December 1992 (resolution 47/88).

THE ELDERLY

International Day for the Elderly (1 October)

In designating 1 October as the International Day for the Elderly (resolution 45/106 of 14 December 1990), the General Assembly appealed for contributions to the Trust Fund for Ageing, which supports projects in developing countries that benefit the aged. The Trust Fund was established as part of the implementation of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted at the 1982 World Assembly on Ageing.

In further implementing the International Plan of Action, the Assembly, in December 1992, adopted a set of global targets on ageing for the year 2001 as a practical strategy for countries to follow in providing for the needs of the elderly (resolution 47/86). The Assembly urged the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other development agencies to include a component on ageing in their programmes and policies. It also called upon the Secretary-General to provide all possible financial resources to the Ageing Unit of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs to enable it to fulfil its mandate as lead agency for the Action Plan on Ageing.

International Year of Older Persons (1999)

By resolution 47/50 of 16 October 1992, the General Assembly decided to observe 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons "in recognition of humanity's demographic coming of age and the promise it holds for maturing attitudes and capabilities in social, economic, cultural and spiritual undertakings, not least for global peace and development in the next century".

By the resolution, the Assembly adopted a Proclamation on Ageing by which it urged the international community to promote projects on ageing, including those for life-long healthy ageing, income generation and new forms of productive ageing. The Proclamation also urged national initiatives to help older people be useful contributors to their societies.

THE FAMILY

International Year of the Family (1994)

In December 1989, the General Assembly proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family (resolution 44/82), in order to increase awareness of family issues and improve the institutional capability of nations to tackle serious family-related problems with comprehensive policies. The Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs is drawing up a programme of action for the observance of the Year, aimed at protecting and strengthening financial and emotional support between family members and related families, including care for children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled.

In 1993, preparatory meetings for the Year are scheduled to take place in Tunis, Tunisia, for Africa and Western Asia (29 March-2 April); in Valletta, Malta, for Europe and North America (26-30 April); in Beijing, China, for Asia and the Pacific (24-28 May); and in Cartagena, Colombia, for Latin America and the Caribbean (10-13 August).

The proclamation of the Year was a follow-up action to the adoption of the Guiding Principles for Social Welfare Policies and Programmes in the Near Future by a global meeting of ministers and senior policy-makers involved in social issues. The meeting, known as the Interregional Consultation on Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes, was held in Vienna in September 1987. The Principles called for social welfare policies to pay greater attention to the family. The follow-up action was endorsed by the Assembly in 1987 (resolution 42/125).

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997)

In 1986, the General Assembly proclaimed the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997), to be observed under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (resolution 41/187). The Decade's four main objectives are: to acknowledge the cultural dimension of development; affirm and enrich cultural identities; broaden participation in culture; and promote international cultural cooperation. The idea for the Decade was first proposed by the 1982 UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies.

On 19 December 1991, the Assembly invited the Secretary-General and the Director-General of UNESCO to prepare a global mid-term review of the Decade, to be presented to the Assembly at its forty-ninth session, in 1994 (resolution 46/157).

DRUG ABUSE CONTROL

United Nations Decade against Drug Abuse (1991-2000)

The United Nations Decade against Drug Abuse (1991-2000) was proclaimed by the General Assembly on 23 February 1990 (resolution S-17/2). Also adopted was a Global Programme of Action to fight illegal drugs on all levels, which focused on international cooperation against illicit production, supply, demand and trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

On 16 December 1992, the Assembly decided to hold four high-level plenary meetings at its forty-eighth session in 1993 to examine the status of international cooperation to fight the illicit production, sale, demand, traffic and distribution of drugs. The Assembly will evaluate the implementation of the Global Programme of Action; identify policies on which satisfactory progress has not been made and promote universal ratification and accession to international drug control treaties, particularly the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. The Assembly will also examine ways to strengthen cooperation in eradicating the growing dangerous links between terrorist groups, drug traffickers and paramilitary gangs, which endanger the constitutional order of States and violate people's basic human rights (resolution 47/99).

By the same resolution, the Assembly noted the activities of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme to promote and monitor the Decade under the theme "A global response to a global challenge". It also noted the recommendation that Governments establish national focal points or coordinating mechanisms for the Decade (resolution 47/101).

A Comprehensive Multidisciplinary Outline of Future Activities in Drug Abuse Control had been adopted at Vienna in 1987 at the International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. National authorities and interested organizations were urged to use the Multidisciplinary Outline for developing and acting on strategies that would attack all aspects of the drug problem, including illicit demand, cultivation of illicit drug crops, trafficking, misuse of the banking system, and treatment and rehabilitation of drug abusers.

The strategies were to include measures to prevent and reduce drug abuse, with a view to eliminating illicit demand; to rehabilitate addicts and reintegrate them into society; and to suppress illicit trafficking. Strategies to control the supply of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances addressed such questions as: eradication and substitution of illicit cultivation; eradication of illicit processing, production and diversion; maintaining a balance between demand and supply of licit drugs; cooperation between the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control and other United Nations bodies to develop a subregional strategy for drug control; and the establishment of monitoring and control mechanisms.

States were asked to strengthen measures against profiting from drug trafficking, against illegal financial flows and against illegal use of the banking system. They were also asked to strengthen judicial and legal systems, and measures against the diversion of arms as well as against the illicit transport of drugs.

International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (26 June)

The General Assembly decided to observe 26 June as the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking as an expression of its determination to strengthen action and cooperation at all levels to achieve the goal of an international society free of drug abuse. It took that action on 26 June 1987 (resolution 42/112), following a recommendation of the 1987 International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

On 23 February 1990, the Assembly adopted a Global Programme of Action to combat illegal drugs, and stated that the International Day was to be observed as part of the effort to raise public awareness about fighting drug abuse and to promote preventive measures.

DECOLONIZATION

International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (1990-2000)

In 1988, the General Assembly declared 1990-2000 as the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism (resolution 43/47). On 19 December 1991, it declared that the ultimate goal of the Decade was the free exercise of the right of self-determination by the peoples of each and every one of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories. In adopting proposals contained in a report of the Secretary-General to serve as a Plan of Action for the Decade, the Assembly invited Member States, the United Nations system, governmental and non-governmental organizations to actively support and participate in the implementation of that Plan.

The Assembly, by resolution 47/23 of 25 November 1992, reaffirmed its resolution 43/47 on the Decade and called on the administering Powers to take all necessary steps to enable the peoples of the Territories concerned to exercise fully, as soon as possible, their right to self-determination and independence. It requested the Special Committee on decolonization to continue to seek suitable means for the immediate and full implementation of the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and to carry out actions approved by the Assembly regarding the Decade.

INTERNATIONAL LAW

United Nations Decade of International Law (1990-1999)

In connection with the United Nations Decade of International Law (1990-1999), the General Assembly adopted, on 25 November 1992, a programme of activities for the Decade's second term (1993-1994) (resolution 47/32). In declaring, in November 1989, the period 1990-1999 as the United Nations Decade of International Law, the Assembly outlined its main purposes as promoting acceptance of and respect for the principles of international law; promoting means and methods for the peaceful settlement of disputes between States, including resort to and full respect for the International Court of Justice; encouraging the progressive development of international law and its codification; and encouraging the teaching, study, dissemination and wider appreciation of international law (resolution 44/23).

In pursuit of those objectives, the programme for the second term of the Decade calls upon States, international and other organizations, as appropriate, to: promote the acceptance of and respect for the principles of international law; become parties to existing multilateral treaties, particularly those relevant to the progressive development of international law and its codification; provide assistance and technical advice to developing countries to facilitate their participation in the multilateral treaty-making process. They, together with international law institutions, are invited to study the means and methods for the peaceful settlement of disputes between States, including resort to and full respect for the International Court of Justice.

In addition, States are asked to encourage educational institutions to introduce courses in international law; consider convening conferences of experts to study the question of preparing model curricula and materials for courses in international law and the training of teachers; organize seminars, symposia, training courses, lectures and meetings and undertake studies on various aspects of international law; and to organize special training in international law for legal professionals, foreign affairs and military personnel. Cooperation is encouraged among persons in developing countries and developed countries involved in the practice of international law; States and other organizations are urged to publish important international legal instruments and studies; and international courts and tribunals are invited to disseminate more widely their judgements and advisory opinions.

Conference of Plenipotentiaries on a Draft Convention on Maritime Liens and Mortgages (Geneva, 1993)

A United Nations and International Maritime Organization Conference of Plenipotentiaries on a Draft Convention on Maritime Liens and Mortgages will take place from 19 April to 7 May. The General Assembly had decided on 20 December 1991 to convene such a Conference at Geneva during the first half of 1993, for a period of three weeks, to consider the draft convention and to embody the results of its work in a convention on maritime liens and mortgages (resolution 46/213).

In deciding to convene the Conference, the Assembly recognized the importance of the subject of maritime liens and mortgages in ship financing and in the development of national merchant fleets; emphasized the need for international uniformity and for the establishment of a widely acceptable international legal instrument governing the subject; and recognized the desirability of facilitating the harmonious and orderly development of world trade. The draft convention was prepared by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

OTHER SPECIAL OBSERVANCES

World Population Day (11 July)

In June 1989, the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme recommended that 11 July be observed by the international community as World Population Day. An outgrowth of the Day of Five Billion, celebrated on 11 July 1987, the Day seeks to focus public attention on the urgency and importance of population issues, particularly in the context of overall development plans and programmes, and the need to find solutions to the world's population problems. Growing at a rate of 1.7 per cent annually, world population reached 5.5 billion in mid-1992. By the end of the century, it will have increased by nearly 750 million, to 6.2 billion, and, by the year 2025, that figure may reach 8.5 billion, according to United Nations population estimates and projections for 1992.

International Day of Peace (Third Tuesday of September)

In 1981, the General Assembly declared that the third Tuesday of September, the opening day of the regular session of the General Assembly each year, "shall be officially dedicated and observed as the International Day of Peace and shall be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples" (resolution 36/67). In a message commemorating the Day on 14 September 1992, the Secretary-General called for a "culture of peace, one in which nations would try to settle disputes and problems through peaceful negotiations rather than the force of arms. Cooperation rather than confrontation should be our motto as we prepare to enter the twenty-first century".

World Habitat Day
(First Monday of October)

Acting on a recommendation of the Commission on Human Settlements, the Assembly, in 1985, designated the first Monday of October as World Habitat Day. The first observance of the Day, in 1986, marked the tenth anniversary of the first international conference on the subject -- Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (May/June 1976, Vancouver, Canada) (resolution 40/202). The theme of the 1992 observance of World Habitat Day was "Shelter for sustainable development". Its message was that there can be no sustainable development while there are over 1 billion homeless people in the world.

World Food Day
(16 October)

The aim of World Food Day, proclaimed in 1979 by the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization, is to heighten public awareness of the world food problem and strengthen solidarity in the struggle against hunger, malnutrition and poverty. In 1980, the General Assembly endorsed observance of the Day in consideration of the fact that "food is a requisite for human survival and well-being and a fundamental human necessity" (resolution 35/70). World Food Day 1992 was dedicated to the theme of "Food and nutrition" and as a reminder of the basic right of all people to safe and healthy food. An International Conference on Nutrition was held in Rome in December 1992. It grew out of the fact that in a world that produces enough to adequately feed everyone, about 780 million people in developing countries -- 20 per cent of their population -- still do not have access to enough food to meet their daily needs.

United Nations Day
(24 October)

The anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Charter -- 24 October 1945 -- has been celebrated as United Nations Day since 1948. It has traditionally been marked throughout the world by meetings, discussions and exhibits on the achievements and goals of the Organization. In 1971, the Assembly recommended that it should be observed as a public holiday by United Nations Member States (resolution 2782 (XXVI)). In a message commemorating United Nations Day 1992, the Secretary-General said "a reinvigorated United Nations will be at the heart of cooperative international progress", and called on people to dedicate themselves anew to the Purposes and Principles of the Charter.

International Week of Science and Peace (Week of 11 November)

In 1988, the Assembly proclaimed an International Week of Science and Peace, to be celebrated each year during the week in which 11 November falls, as a special week of action devoted to "science and peace", in order to generate and increase public interest in this topic (resolution 43/61). The date was chosen to retain the date of the first International Week of Scientists for Peace (10-16 November 1986). Institutions of advanced studies, scientific academies, professional associations and individuals were urged to hold during that Week lectures, seminars, special debates and other activities conducive to the study and dissemination of information on the links between progress in science and technology and the maintenance of peace and security (resolution 45/70).

Other International Days

Other international days observed throughout the United Nations system include:

International Women's Day (8 March); World Meteorological Day (23 March); World Health Day (7 April); World Telecommunication Day (17 May); World No-Tobacco Day (31 May); International Literacy Day (8 September); World Maritime Day (during the last week in September); Universal Children's Day (traditionally, first Monday of October); World Post Day (9 October); World Development Information Day (24 October); World AIDS Day (1 December); and International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development (5 December).

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